

Singapore Journal; A Flogging Sentence Brings a Cry of Pain in U.S.

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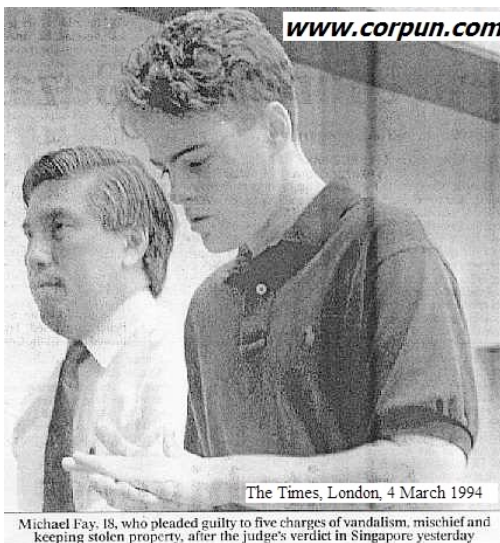
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SINGAPORE, March 11 — The future of relations between the United States and one of its closest allies in Southeast Asia may rest on whether this futuristic, order-loving city-state carries out a punishment that dates back to its colonial past.

An American teen-ager, who has pleaded guilty to spray-painting cars and other mischief here, has been sentenced to a flogging, a punishment that has drawn a harsh personal protest from President Clinton.

Singapore has rejected American criticisms of the sentence -- six lashes with a moistened rattan cane -- imposed on 18-year-old Michael Fay of Dayton, Ohio. It responded that tough criminal laws had saved it from the fate of "cities like New York, where even police cars are not spared the acts of vandals."

President Clinton told reporters at a news conference in Washington this month that the United States had made a "strong protest" to Singapore. "This punishment is extreme, and we hope very much that somehow it will be reconsidered," he said



Michael Fay, 18, who pleaded guilty to five charges of vandalism, mischief and keeping stolen property, after the judge's verdict in Singapore yesterday

Mr. Fay, a student at the Singapore-American School, has pleaded guilty to two counts of vandalism and two counts of mischief, admitting that he was one of a group of youths who spray-painted 18 cars, threw eggs at other cars and switched license plates. He also confessed that he had been in possession of traffic signs and Singapore flags that had been stolen by the son of a Swedish diplomat.

He was ordered to pay a \$2,230 fine and was sentenced to four months in prison and six lashes of the cane. Canings, in which an official trained in the martial arts strikes a prisoner's buttocks with a half-inch-thick rattan cane moistened in water, are so painful that prisoners often go into shock before the flogging is completed. They leave permanent scars.

The judge who imposed the sentence, F. G. Remedios, said that Mr. Fay's crimes "could not be condoned as a display of growing pains and schoolboy pranks." Mr. Fay is in a Singapore hospital for psychiatric treatment as he waits for the punishment to be carried out. His family appealed for clemency.

The Singapore Government has executed four foreigners for drug trafficking in recent days despite international pleas for clemency and has laws so strict that it is illegal to fail to flush a public toilet. Singapore has said that it will not back down in the case of Mr. Fay.

"We do not have a situation where acts of vandalism are commonplace," the ministry said, "as in cities like New York, where even police cars are not spared the acts of vandals."

Mr. Fay arrived in Singapore in 1992 to live with his mother and stepfather, who works for an American package-delivery company.